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The Great Escape, an event billed by Mahindra, re-introducing their vehicles to those in KZN for this specific event, forming part of a National rollout event at various provinces, the vehicles and staff covering the country on their quest. Not being well versed with the Mahindra vehicles, having last driven one some ten years or more ago, I was pleasantly surprised by the invite. Arrival at the impressively scenic iNsingizi Lodge, mid Illovo KZN, the six Mahindra vehicles stood ready to entertain over two days in four staged sessions.

The venue providing a great environment where lunch was served followed by an introduction and presentation to the Mahindra brand and vehicles by Mr. David Mokoena. As I am sure the public may not be aware, I too was somewhat surprised to learn of the origins of Mahindra, from a 1945 steel trading company, diversified to Mahindra's interests worldwide, to mention but a few; Aerospace, Motorcycles, farming equipment, Construction equipment, Hospitality, Real estate & Leisure investments and Financial services.



Interestingly and quite accurately appointed, the brand has two key catch phrases, the first a sung phrase "we live young, we live free, we are the living" which forms part of their marketing strategy. No doubt, this marketing is clearly aimed at the up and coming, with freedom through motoring being a key. The second being the phrase "Real deals for real people needing real solutions" a realistic and perhaps no more applicable motto where a combined work horse and daily vehicle will always be needed, but not always affordable to the masses. Their marketing strategy includes their own adventure face book page (<https://www.facebook.com/MahindraAdventure>) and Mahindra Adventure website (<http://mahindraadventure.com/>).



The academic introduction to the brand and the vehicles completed, we split into groups occupying the four 4x4 Scorpio Pick Up's, each vehicle escorted by a professional driver trainer guiding the route and highlighting the attributes and abilities of the vehicles through both discussion and practical displays. Covering the varying off-road terrain, with occasional stop points, the opportunity was presented for each to drive and scrutinize the vehicle, with the usual banter on aspects of the vehicles themselves and the nuances of their market place positioning.

The vehicles themselves are very good, perhaps the most notable factor is that the general built quality has improved vastly. Although some typical and perhaps quaint quirks are still the norm and perhaps expected, like the rather timid indoor door opening levers on a vehicle that is essentially a workhorse. The unusual carbon look finish on the center dash console and the rather tiny roof mounted grab handles, these do not detract from the overall ability and definitely value of the vehicle. The usual air-conditioning that worked extremely well in the KZN heat including rear outlets, very smooth and massive four electric windows, height adjustable steering and fully adjustable seats, decent entertainment with multiple speakers, multiple power outlets, USB, Auxiliary and even SD card facility. Central locking and Steering mounted Audio and Cruise Control functions, multiple liquid holder's front and back and somewhat impressively cellular phone or universal pocket holder's front and back. Appropriately massive and electrically operated side rear view mirrors and other standard

features all form part of a good level of comfort and utility in the work room. Dual Airbags, Abs and side impact protection enhance the safety aspects.

Off the bat, the ride quality through the suspension ride stability and comfort with five robust (I say with a smile) adult males aboard over some extremely rough terrain is massively impressive. Even seated in the rear seats, the ride quality is impressive, with good legroom. Likewise the steering feedback and general feel is impressive. Brakes were more than up to the task, with ventilated and slotted discs up front and drums at the rear, with braking feel and braking ability appearing true and flawless.

Although by today's standards, with unnecessary emphasis always placed on ridiculous and unnecessary Kilowatt readings, a relatively low powered 2.2liter Turbo Diesel engine at 88kws, the toque at 270nm does duty. The engine is very smooth and more than capable and never feels uncomfortable stressed in these conditions. Perhaps this is exactly what we need in our country with the current carnage. Interestingly, the engine bay layout is impressive, very compact and neat, with an almost European look. Engine noise with windows open and closed is impressively low.

A five speed gearbox does duty, with a typical long but acceptable change action, slightly right side bias. Operating a 4x4 system that has full function of low range, high range and likewise a Mahindra specific self-engaging and disengaging on the fly diff-lock that when test operated impressively.

Arguably the most important feature to a buyer is both the clear improvement in reliability confidence where Mahindra has introduced the service intervals increasing from five thousand kilometer to twenty thousand kilometer intervals, however with the proviso of using only the specific Mahindra brand oil Maxilane. No doubt this will prove to be a key selling point.

The vehicles ability to carry a load, along with passengers in comfort, is in no doubt, with a decently proportioned load bin, and the vehicles specified capacity to carry 1 ton on the 4x4.

Not having driven the vehicle for any long distance or period of time, I can only refer to the noted consumption values at 8.8 L/100 combined cycle and Urban at 10.3L/100, which do not seem unreasonable. The 80 liter tank suggesting a good range for the vehicle.

Mahindra is clearly making continuous improvements and upgrades, with the somewhat quirky styling of certain things being the only relatively trivial drawback to what is unequivocally a very good and extremely capable vehicle that is very good value for money.

